

CINÉMATHÈQUE FRANÇAISE

51 RUE DE BERCY - 75012 PARIS

Cinéma d'avant-garde / Contre-culture générale

ROMANI CINEMA

FIGURATIVE DEFAMATIONS AND DOCUMENTED RECTIFICATIONS



Daniel Gontz, *Gypsy Blooz*, 2007

« Only to the Jews and the Gypsies it happened to be industrially exterminated as people who have been denied the right to share land with other human beings. »
Elisabeth de Fontenay, *Actes de naissance. Entretiens avec Stéphane Bou* (Seuil, 2011)

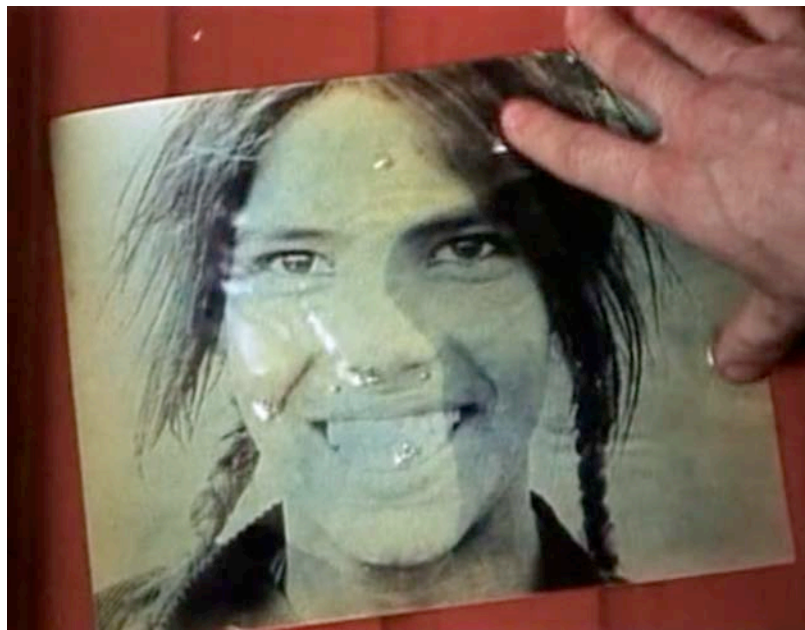
The intersection between the avant-garde cinematography and Romani families (Roma, Manush, Gitanos, Gypsies, Travellers, Sinti, Zingari) combines two forms of critical initiatives: visual replicas on the one side, developed against the figurative defamations to which these families are subject, as a work of documented objection and rectification, putting the ideological dimension of imagery into the light; and on the other side, the descriptions and statements made freely, outside of any polemic or prejudice.

The modern history of figurative defamations “starts with the invention of photography” (Menelaos Karamaghiolis, *Rom*, 1989), e.g. with the images of Romani families, massively co-produced by the police systems, mass media and cultural industry. To the visual regime of the majority of images – that, since the end of the 19th century, have pulled back the comprehension of Romani families into social and moral miserabilism – are opposed the way that documentary filmmakers such as Pilar Arcila & Jean-Marc Lamoure, Caterina Pasqualino & Chiara Dambrosio, look at, listen and pay attention to these families. These filmmakers disprove the photogenic aspect of misery, especially thanks to the voice of said families and the *emic* poetry through which they see life. Additionally, in the face of the fantasy imagery picturing Romani families that is deployed on postcards from the beginning of the 20th century on, to the most recent cinematic fables, artists like Daniel Gontz and Menelaos Karamaghiolis manage to put a twist on these sometimes almost mythological topoi. From a historical standpoint, in the continuity of Peter & Zsóka Nestler, Charmant Rouge dedicates himself to classificatory and police-related images that have accompanied the monitoring, administrative control, detention and later the deportation of Zigeuner by the German authorities. Charmant Rouge also exhumes a voyeuristic aspect from the Austrian archives where Romani are reduced to touristic curiosities, ontologically comparable to prisoners in a zoo. Similarly to Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi, Charmant Rouge and Menelaos Karamaghiolis show how amateur images gain visual sovereignty within the controlling environment itself.

The *Romani Cinema* presented here claims on the contrary plurality, complexity and creative initiatives from the Romani families. To begin with, films have affirmed a culture of contact between Romani families and avant-gardes. This contact culture, which appeared with literary bohemianism in the 19th century, lasts into the 21st century, as films by Ben Vine, Tomáš Doruška or Mona Vătămanu and Florin Tudor show it. Their films oppose ostracism and discrimination based on the show that is expulsion and the overpowering longevity of silver halide photography. As part of his cooperation with the Shukar Collective, partly made of gypsy musicians, Daniel Gontz oppose a secular, visual regime to the powerful and ephemeral energy of a music score by VJing. The conditions of the possibility for an encounter become a stake of documentation work, thanks to the ethnologists from the CNRS: Yasuhiro and Kimie Omori undertake a visual improvisation in 16 minutes; Caterina Pasqualino and Chiara Dambrosio study the forms of resistance inspired by flamenco music and the political history of Granada. With Pilar Arcila, the encounter becomes a common enterprise: *Le Pendule de Costel* (*Costel's Pendulum*, 2013)

establishes an editing method that is neither alternating nor parallel, but that we could qualify as auxiliary, between her own Super 8 images and the digital ones of a gypsy family. The result is a high density visual experience that is at the same time ethical and aesthetic. With Tomáš Doruška, the encounter becomes a political upsurge. For the first time, a film in Romanès language was broadcasted without subtitles on Czech public television.

As of the end of the 1970s, a properly Romani contemporary art form is developed. It is represented by the works of Katelan Foisy, Delaine Le Bas, Damian James Le Bas and Phillip Osborne, as well as the female authors of the collective film *Sárral kevert vér* (2014). Their work features the way Romani communities experience time – as a collective memory (*Chuvihoni*), highly poetic (*Rokkerenna*), searching for remnants and signs of the English-Romani culture at the heart of the modern, urban space (Delaine Le Bas' *Gypsylands*). These works are also the traces of a memory (*Sárral kevert vér*) and culture (*Witches Compass*) that were lost following the genocide and the migratory movements it induced. It is through the contact with historical avant-gardes in general, and Taylor Mead in particular, that Katelan Foisy reinvents her history and culture (*For a Gadjo*). This *Romani Cinema* repoliticizes and reconfigures space, history, experience, and writing. It brings us a counter-culture "at the avant-garde of our people, of Europe, of the world" (Ethel Brooks), the science of this people about which has been made notice that it is the only one never to have started a war.



Menelaos Karamaghiolis, *ROM*, 1989

Jonathan Larcher, Nicole Brenez.

Friday 17 June, 07:30 p.m., Romani I. Ethnographic Descriptions

Mour Djiben. Ma vie de tzigane manouche (Mour Djiben. My tzigane gypsy life) **by Yasuhiro Omori & Kimie Omori**

France/1976/59'/16mm

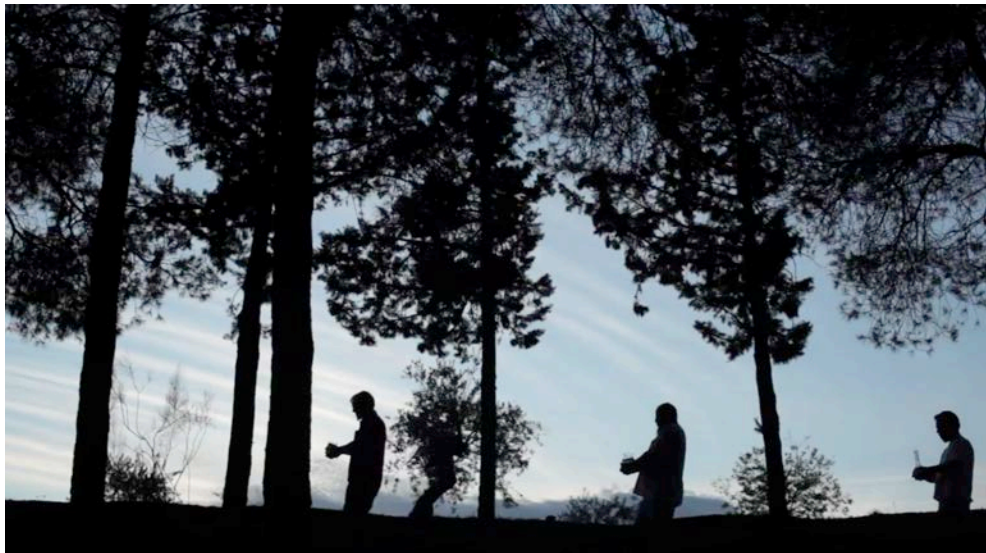
« The everyday life of a Manush family moving with a horse-drawn wagon in the centre of France, filmed by a ethnologist. "Is it the authors' status of foreigners that give the dialogues such sincerity, and such tolerance as they record intimate sequences? Coming from a country where no Gypsies live, they do not hold conscious or subconscious prejudices against the Manush, commonly shared by sedentary Europeans. Their work is truly remarkable in its accuracy. Within the very limits of its ambitions, this film is a good ethnographic document, both in the development of the theme and its technical qualities". (*Études Tsiganes* n° 3, 1977)

Olvido (Oblivion)

by Ben Vine

Spain/2006/3'22/S8

« Shot in a single sequence on expired super 8 mm film in the very same flea market where I bought it, *Olvido* is a reflection on the ambiguous status and the role of these street musicians in Spanish society. Questioning my own gaze as well, this film is a reflection on what society considers as art, as culture and as trash. Notions which intertwine. » (Ben Vine)



Caterina Pasqualino, Chiara Ambrosio, *Tierra Inquieta*, 2015

Tierra Inquieta (Unquiet Earth)

by Caterina Pasqualino & Chiara Ambrosio

Spain/2015/74'/digital

« « To deal with the 2007 economic crisis which provoked a vast social misery, neighbours from Caseria De Montijo (Granada, Spain) decided to come together and get organized, and planted a communal orchard on land that previously served as an illegal dump. In this orchard our protagonists – Antonio, Oscar and Santiago – want to believe in the possibility of a fairer world, and cast their lives as art. Out of work, they could have easily gotten depressed. Instead, they chose to take action. This orchard in Caseria is, like the protagonists, a film subject in itself. Alive just like the men who grow it, the orchard of Caseria "tiene memoria", it remembers the violence that scarred this region for so many years. Just a few miles away from the orchard of Caseria are the mass graves of Viznar, where the bodies of the Republicans slaughtered by Franco's soldiers during the Civil War of 1937 still lay unburied. In Caseria they say that these bodies may have been a good fertilizer for the soil. The three characters in the film perform a "Water Ceremony" to ward off (conjure) the drought on this fertile land with a turbulent history, and bless it anew. »

(Caterina Pasqualino & Chiara Ambrosio)

Friday 17 June, 10:00 p.m., Romani II. History of control, genocide and visual sovereignty

Fingerprints

by Charmant Rouge

Austria/2007/7'/16mm

« Over Tamburizza music from the Burgenland and Croatia, Charmant Rouge reuses two filmic archives. The first archive is made from amateur images shot in the Austrian state of Burgenland. Tourism was for the Austrian government a way of consolidate its sovereignty in the region, newly acquired in 1921. The second archive represents the registration of Roma and Sinti to the Eisentasdt police files. » (Jonathan Larcher)



Charmant Rouge, *Fingerprints*, 2007

ROM (POM)

by Menelaos Karamaghiolis

Greece/1989/75'/16mm/English Subtitles

« ROM is an avant-garde film produced by Greek National TV - after years of negotiations to persuade them to produce a film about Romani people in Greece. It was the first time that the word "Rom" was used in Greek society and it provoked problems with Greek television that censored the film on its television premiere in 1989. The committee thought that the film was insulting to Greek society and its religious sentiments. The good point is that the film (and its soundtrack) became popular and circulated worldwide to the point of being identified as the "turning point in Greek documentary film" by Katerina Athanasiadou. For me it is crucial and interesting that one year after the film ROM was produced, the situation of the Greek Gypsies completely changed. Nevertheless, nowadays, the population in Greek youth detention centres is constituted of 90% of young Roma boys. » (Menelaos Karamaghiolis)

Friday 15 July, 07:30 p.m., Romani III. Participatory Representations

El Patio de Robella

Collective film, supervised by Pilar Arcila & Jean-Marc Lamoure

France/2007/10'/Super8-DV Cam

« We thought about working on the transmission of oral history between different generations in Montgrand gypsy neighbourhood. The story of the children was told through an autobiographical song composed by a teenager from the neighbourhood. This song, known by all in Montgrand, recounts the story of a boy sent to prison as he accumulated illicit practices, where he begins to look into his consciousness. From this song, we elaborated a mixed form, bringing together proposals for staged presentations of the song, poetical evocations of its themes (including theft, guilt, confinement, freedom), and elements of reality gathered during the fifteen days that lasted the shooting. » (Pilar Arcila, Jean-Marc Lamoure)



Pilar Arcila, Jean-Marc Lamoure, *El Patio de Robella*, 2007

Le Coq et l'hirondelle (The Cock and the Swallow)

Collective film, supervised by Pilar Arcila & Jean-Marc Lamoure

France/2008/7'/Super8

Made with the bribes of the daily life, a song, desires and questions, this film offers a poetic variation around two birds, symbolic of the neighbourhood. It is a tale with no moral, directed by Jean-Marc Lamoure and Pilar Arcila, together with the kids of Montgrand neighbourhood (Marseille, district 11).

Le Pendule de Costel (Costel's Pendulum)

by Pilar Arcila

France/2013 /68'/Super8-DV Cam

« Roma coming from Romania, Costel and his extended family travel between France, Switzerland and their own country, searching ways to earn a living. Home movie and poetical archive of the present, the documentary, intertwines different perspectives and follows their daily life of resourcefulness, beliefs and survival. Balancing between wandering and economic migration, Costel travels across different European countries with different economical situations, putting to the test the poorest communities' dreams for an egalitarian society. » (Pilar Arcila)

Friday 15 July, 09:30 p.m. Romani IV. Romani creations

Gypsy Blooz **by Daniel Gontz**

Romania / 2005 / 3'41 / digital

A visual improvisation on the music produced by the Shukar Collective.

Rite of Spring **by Mona Vătămanu & Florin Tudor**

Romania / 2010 / 8' / Super 8

« This film started with the encounter of the simple and poetic gesture of Roma children lighting ephemeral fires. Burning white fluffy clouds of pollen implies a promise – the promise of renewal and spring. Some of them are street kids, others have a family, some of them have a house and others don't, or only abandoned houses without a roof. On occasion, their mesmerizing game leads to a bigger fire. This yearly ritual is also a metaphor for the different sparks setting on fire – at the end of the last decade – well established orders and resulting in changes in several societies. » (Mona Vătămanu et Florin Tudor)

Dobré srdce (Good Heart) **by Tomáš Doruška**

Czech Republic / 1998 / 8' / 16mm

« The first film ever broadcasted in Roma language on Czech public TV without Czech subtitles, *Good Heart* is an adaptation of a Roma folk tale recounting an evening in a little cottage house in the countryside. This film took shape following a rewriting of this tale by Milena Hübschmannová, that was published by the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno (Czech Republic). » (Tomáš Doruška)

Glasgow Gypsyland **by Delaine Le Bas**

United Kingdom / 2013 / 7' / digital

« *To Gypsyland* is an archive project and a multimedia practice that explore the urban Travellers communities and the idea of a *Gypsyland*. Gypsies and Travellers have always been part of the "English pastoral imagination" and the romantic stereotypes of the countryside. But where is the history of urban Travellers and Gypsies in the city landscapes? [...] This ongoing project *To Gypsyland* presents a new picture of what 'Gypsyland' has historically been seen as, what it currently is and what it can possibly be. Ideas of nomadism, creativity out of necessity, a language that has its roots in the far East and the diversity of the community will be discussed and re-presented. » (Delaine Le Bas)

Rokkerenna **by Phillip Osborne & Damian James Le Bas**

United Kingdom / 2012 / 4' / digital

« This film is the manifesto of the collective Notown Productions. *Rokkerenna* is a daydream made between the two banks of a river. One owns to the past, from which the missing traces should be bring back through poetry, the other one is made by a present time where "nothing really happens". "The average day of English Gypsy life, it's just as boring as anybody's else is". Phillip Osborne and Damian James Le Bas represent a perception of time without using the popular iconographies of the gypsy characters and without kind of essentialism. » (Jonathan Larcher)



Delaine Le Bas, *Glasgow Gypsyland*, 2013

Chuvihoni

by Delaine Le Bas & Damian James Le Bas

United Kingdom / 2014 / 5' / digital

« The departure point was a belief that in Gypsy culture, as in others, collective memory is retained through four phenomena: past places, past persons; present spaces, present persons. The challenge was to create a sense of these 'memory spaces' in the form of a film: a multi-disciplinary, multi-creator approach was essential in order to do justice to the nature of collective memory. A recording of artist Delaine Le Bas in conversation with her grandmother, alongside footage by Damian James Le Bas of traditional Romani stopping places in Hampshire, formed the spine of the piece. » (Delaine Le Bas & Damian James Le Bas)

Sárral kevert vér (Muddy Blood)

by Sőregi Alexandra, Kovács Szandra, Szajkó Cintia, Varga Krisztina, Horváth Diána

Hungary / 2014 / 4'21 / digital / English subtitles

Made during a workshop, this collective short film recounts the death of hundreds of Roma people during the World War II, and reflects on the verse of the Romani author Choli Daróczi József : « All the Gypsies were taken away. Taken away to dig trenches. The trench deepens slowly. Water bubbles up from its depths. »

For a Gadjo

by Katelan Foisy

USA / 2013 / 4' / Super 8

« The city of New Orleans could tell you a thousand stories whispered from river and wind, cobblestone and bone. Three *pennies* at the crossroads, nine at the gate, and three more at the grave. An old house transformed from a brothel to a keeper of travellers, a history still ingrained in its wood. But here the passageways speak to you. They give you prescriptions on paper scribbled ever so slightly. Here there are no secrets. Only tiny stars that fall to find their place on earth and into the light. Gypsies have two traditions. One is to leave something you own in a place you want to return to. The other is of moon and sun. » (Katelan Foisy)

Witches Compass

de Katelan Foisy

USA / 2014 / 4'10 / Super 8

« That film was made for an installation about what plagues us, what makes us feel like an outsider looking in. Roosevelt Island, as many island off of New York City was a plague Islands. Roosevelt Island held the mental institute and also the smallpox hospital. Furthermore, North Brother Island held the hospital Mary Mallon was isolated. Using also war footages, and crow images, my totem animal, this film is a reflection about my own ancestors, their lost culture, and what makes us as outsiders. » (Katelan Foisy)

Pictures : ©each author.

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